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SUBJECT: OPTIMISM ON CHINA FROM DEPUTY FM PAROLIN (C-ALS-00716)

REF: A) STATE 145435 B) VATICAN 484

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Political Officer, POL, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

11. (C) Vatican Deputy Foreign Minister Parolin told the Charge August 9 that there were signs that Beijing might eventually be open to some official Vatican presence in China as a first step towards diplomatic relations. According to Parolin, an initial Holy See representative would have some official status, but would obviously not be a full-fledged apostolic nuncio. The important thing, he said, would be for the representative to enjoy full freedom of movement and the ability to speak to "whomever he wants." Parolin would not hazard a guess as to a time frame for any such arrangement; we understand he was referring to continuing unofficial talks that are only the precursor to more serious negotiations between the two sides. Parolin acknowledged Taiwanese fears of being "abandoned" by the Holy See in the event of an upgrade of relations with Beijing, but said the Vatican would find a way to maintain "some presence" in Taiwan. Though Parolin's comments do not augur an imminent breakthrough on China, they were more optimistic and detailed than what we typically hear from the Secretariat of State on the matter. End Summary.

Signs of Openness

12. (C) Holy See Deputy Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin told the Charge August 9 that there were signs that Beijing might eventually be open to some Vatican presence in China as a first step towards diplomatic relations. Parolin said that informal unofficial dialogue with China was continuing, and he had the impression that eventually the two sides could come to an agreement on a Holy See representative resident in China.

Our Man in China

13. (C) According to Parolin, an initial Holy See representative would have some official status, but would obviously not be a full-fledged apostolic nuncio. Parolin said the Vatican would be careful about proposing a title for the representative, since even this variable could raise hackles. "The title is not important to us," Parolin emphasized. "We would just have to be sure that any Vatican representative would enjoy freedom of movement, and could speak to whomever he wants." This includes members of the underground church. "If the Chinese won't agree to those terms we won't do it," he concluded.

14. (C) When asked about a time frame for any real movement on these issues, Parolin said it was hard to say. "Some said [China] would [move to normalize relations] before the [Beijing 2008] Olympics," he recalled, "but who knows?" "This process is unpredictable," he added. Still, Parolin thinks that when the two sides are finally able to come to an agreement, things will move fast. He said that once they could agree upon a formula for the papal representative, in addition to overcoming longstanding differences over appointment of bishops, other details would fall into place relatively quickly, and full relations would follow.

Taiwan

15. (C) Turning to another side of the equation, Parolin admitted that Taiwan feared being "abandoned" by the Vatican when the Holy See eventually formalizes relations with Beijing. Though he acknowledged the obvious necessity of downgrading relations with Taipei at the time of an upgrade with Beijing, Parolin insisted that the Vatican would not simply drop Taiwan. He said the Holy See would "continue to inform Taiwan" throughout the process, and that the Vatican would look for a way to maintain "some presence" in Taiwan, even though a representative would not be able to maintain ambassadorial status.

Comment

16. (C) Parolin's comments were more optimistic and detailed than most commentary we have heard from the Holy See's Secretariat of State on this subject. There has certainly been

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some movement on this front, even if it has been confined to unofficial talks between Vatican-affiliated groups and semi-official Chinese representatives. However, as Parolin implied when speaking of timing, concrete progress could still be a long way off.

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